



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **19 arrested in major marriage and immigration fraud scheme in Northern Virginia**

ALEXANDRIA, VA – Nineteen of 22 charged individuals involved in a marriage and immigration fraud scheme operating in Northern Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia were arrested today as part of a three-year law enforcement task force operation.

Chuck Rosenberg, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; William Reid, Assistant Director of Investigations, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Chief M. Douglas Scott, Arlington County Police Department; Richard Trodden, Arlington County Commonwealth's Attorney; Colonel David Rohrer, Fairfax County Police Department; Greg Sebben, Special Agent-in-Charge, Office of the Inspector General, Department of Commerce; Charles Pine, Special Agent-in-Charge, Internal Revenue Service; Stephen Brunette, Special Agent-in-Charge, Diplomatic Security Service, Department of State; and, Phyllis Howard, Washington District Director, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, made the announcement at a press conference at the Arlington County Courthouse following the arrests.

As described in the government's affidavit, nine defendants are alleged to have arranged marriages between aliens seeking immigration benefits and United States citizens willing to enter into a sham marriage for money. The next ten defendants are aliens who are alleged to have entered into a sham marriage to gain immigration benefits and avoid potential removal from the United States. The final three defendants are United States citizens who married aliens and are alleged to have signed false documents to assist the alien in obtaining immigration benefits through fraud.

Aliens who participated in the fraud generally paid large fees, between \$2,500 and \$6,000, to the defendants who facilitated sham marriages. In exchange, the aliens were introduced to United States citizens, generally on the day of the marriage. The aliens also then had assistance in filing materially false immigration paperwork. The United States citizens involved in the scheme generally were paid approximately \$500 on the day of the marriage, and an additional \$300 per month from the alien for approximately one year.

"U.S. Citizenship is precious, and, for those who come to our country from abroad, must be earned and not purchased" said U.S. Attorney Rosenberg.

Arlington County Police Chief Scott stated, "Alert employees in the Arlington Clerk's Office noticed a pattern of suspicious marriages. They brought it to our attention and we began a fraud investigation. Detectives in our Vice Control Section uncovered evidence of a conspiracy and then worked closely with our federal partners to bring the suspects involved to justice."

As alleged in the affidavit, the defendants who facilitated the sham marriages also coached the sham “couples” about how to answer questions during interviews conducted by the Department of Homeland Security, Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS-CIS).

For instance, couples were told to memorize the name of their sham spouse, learn false stories about how they met, and prepare answers to questions about on which side of the bed they sleep. In addition, to support the falsehood that a “couple” lived together, the “couple” was instructed to obtain false documents showing a shared residence. Some couples thus obtained state identification documents, utility bills, insurance documents, and bank records listing a false, shared address. Some couples were told to take photographs together so it would appear they shared a life.

"Immigration and benefit fraud is not simply a nuisance crime, it poses a serious security vulnerability and contributes to a host of other types of crimes, including identity theft and financial fraud," said William Reid Assistant Director of Investigations for ICE. "The goal of the task force is to identify, and dismantle the criminal organizations behind these highly lucrative schemes, and to let the perpetrators know that U.S. citizenship is not for sale."

The investigation was conducted by a task force of federal and local law enforcement agencies including: the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); the Arlington County Police Department; the Fairfax County Police Department; the Diplomatic Security Service, Department of State; the Internal Revenue Service; and the Office of the Inspector General, Department of Commerce.

The task force received important assistance from several other agencies including the Fraud Detection and National Security Unit within DHS-CIS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Beth Gibson and Jeanine Linehan are prosecuting the case for the United States.

Defendants are presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*